

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-11 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 DRC-01 /102 W

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R 021437Z AUG 74

FM AMEMBASSY LONDON

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2711

INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

AMEMBASSY DUBLIN

AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY ROME

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: UK, PINT

SUBJECT: COALITION

SUMMARY - THE LIBERALS ARE PUSHING THE IDEA OF AN ALL-PARTY COALITION, LABOR IS STRENUOUSLY OPPOSED TO ANY COALITION, THE CONSERVATIVES ARE KEEPING THEIR OPTIONS OPEN, AND THE NATIONALISTS AND ULSTER UNIONISTS HOPE TO SELL THEIR SUPPORT DEAR. CURRENT OPINION POLLS INDICATE THAT THE NEXT GENERAL ELECTION, WIDELY EXPECTED IN EARLY OCTOBER, MAY PROVE AS INCONCLUSIVE AS THE LAST. IF SO, THE PROSPECTS FOR STRONG GOVERNMENT IN BRITAIN ARE GLOOMY. END SUMMARY

1. PARLIAMENT ROSE ON JULY 31 FOR ITS SUMMER RECESS AMIDST WIDESPREAD EXPECTATION THAT IT WOULD NOT REASSEMBLE THIS SIDE OF A GENERAL ELECTION. UNLESS ONE OR THE
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OTHER OF THE TWO MAJOR PARTIES SUBSTANTIALLY IMPROVES ON

ITS CURRENT STANDING IN THE PUBLIC OPINION POLLS, THE NEXT ELECTION IS UNLIKELY TO BE MORE CONCLUSIVE THAN THE LAST. IN THAT EVENT THE QUESTION OF WHETHER OR NOT TO ENTER INTO COALITION, AND IF SO, INTO WHAT KIND OF A COALITION, WILL AGAIN COME TO THE FORE. THIS MESSAGE ATTEMPTS TO SET OUT BRIEFLY CURRENT THINKING ON THE SUBJECT IN THE VARIOUS PARTIES.

2. THE LIBERAL PARTY HAS MOST TO GAIN FROM ENTERING A COALITION. AFTER DEBATING THE MATTER IN PUBLIC FOR THE BETTER PART OF A MONTH, THE OVERWHELMING BULK OF THE PARTY HAS AGREED TO FOLLOW JEREMY THORPE'S LEAD IN CAMPAIGNING FOR THE FORMATION OF A "GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY," I.E., AN ALL-PARTY GOVERNMENT. THORPE'S MAIN ARGUMENT -- WHICH HAS CONSIDERABLE SUPERFICIAL APPEAL TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC -- IS THAT ONLY AN ALL-PARTY GOVERNMENT WILL HAVE THE NECESSARY AUTHORITY TO DEAL WITH THE ENORMOUS ECONOMIC DIFFICULTIES THAT LIE JUST AHEAD. THIS APPROACH HAS THE FURTHER ADVANTAGE OF AVOIDING A DAMAGING FIGHT WITHIN THE LIBERAL PARTY AMONG THOSE WHO OPPOSE ENTERING INTO A COALITION WITH JUST ONE OF THE MAJOR PARTIES.

3. THE LABOR PARTY HAS CATEGORICALLY REJECTED THE IDEA OF PARTICIPATING IN ANY KIND OF COALITION. HAROLD WILSON HAS REPEATEDLY STATED THAT HE WOULD HAVE NOTHING TO DO WITH A COALITION, THE LEFT WING OF THE PARTY IS VIOLENTLY OPPOSED, AND EVEN ROY JENKINS, IN HIS MOST RECENT MAJOR SPEECH (LONDON 9650), MADE CLEAR THAT HE CONSIDERED COALITION POLITICS A BAD IDEA. AS ONE LEADING JENKINSITE EXPLAINED TO US, ENTRY INTO A COALITION WOULD SPLIT THE PARTY WIDE OPEN, WITH THE LEFT TAKING THE BULK OF THE ORGANIZATION AND THE ACTIVE MEMBERSHIP INTO OPPOSITION. THE CENTER PARTIES WOULD BE SADDLED WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR COPING WITH THE NATION'S ECONOMIC PROBLEMS WHILE THE

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EXTREMISTS, LEFT AND RIGHT, WOULD BE FREE TO SNIPE AWAY
AND FEED ON POPULAR DISCONTENT.

4. THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY'S APPROACH IS MORE NUANCED.
ON THE ONE HAND IT IS RELUCTANT TO ESPOUSE THE PROSPECT
OF COALITION GOVERNMENT, LEST IT PROMPT WAVERING TORIES
TO VOTE LIBERAL ON THE PREMISE THAT IT HARDLY MATTERED
WHICH WAY THEIR BALLOT WAS CAST. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE
CONSERVATIVES DO NOT WANT TO APPEAR HOSTILE TO THE IDEA
OF A GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNITY BEING FORMED TO COPE
WITH AN ECONOMIC CRISIS. THEY PREFER TO LEAVE IT TO
LABOR TO TAKE THE ONUS FOR THAT KIND OF A NEGATIVE
APPROACH. FINALLY, THEY DO NOT WANT TO DO OR SAY ANY-
THING THAT WOULD RULE OUT THE POSSIBILITY OF A CONSER-
VATIVE-LIBERAL GOVERNMENT AFTER THE NEXT ELECTION.

5. THE SCOTTISH NATIONALISTS ARE HOPEFUL OF EXPANDING
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THEIR REPRESENTATION IN THE NEXT PARLIAMENT, AND IF A
FUTURE GOVERNMENT HAD TO DEPEND ON THEIR VOTES TO SURVIVE
THEY WOULD OBVIOUSLY TRY TO SELL THEIR SUPPORT DEAR. BY
THE SAME TOKEN, THE ULSTER UNIONISTS, WHO PROVIDED THE
NECESSARY MARGINS FOR THE OPPOSITION TO PASS FIVE AMEND-
MENTS TO THE TRADE UNIONS BILL THIS WEEK (LONDON 9718),
HAVE MADE CLEAR THAT THEY ARE ANXIOUS TO SUPPORT A FUTURE
CONSERVATIVE GOVERNMENT -- BUT AT THE PRICE OF SECURING
A GOOD PART OF THEIR PROGRAM FOR NORTHERN IRELAND.

AND FEW POLITICIANS ARE PREPARED TO PREDICT WITH ANY
CONFIDENCE THE OUTCOME OF THE NEXT ELECTION. IF THE RE-
SULTS ARE AS MIXED AS LAST TIME, THE FORMATION OF A
GOVERNMENT WILL REQUIRE CONSIDERABLE BARGAINING AND
COMPROMISE AND THE OUTCOME COULD BE ANYTHING FROM ANOTHER
MINORITY LABOR GOVERNMENT TO A MINORITY CONSERVATIVE
GOVERNMENT TO A CONSERVATIVE-LIBERAL COALITION, ALL DE-
PENDENT TO ONE DEGREE OR ANOTHER ON THE SUPPORT OF FRINGE
NATIONALISTS. IT'S A SOBERING PROSPECT THAT IS BOUND TO
HAUNT THE POLITICIANS AS THEY TAKE OFF FOR THEIR TRADI-
TIONAL AUGUST VACATIONS.

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